

During Caspers, E.C.L. (1934-1996)

By D. T. Potts

Elisabeth Christina Louisa During Caspers, known to her friends as Inez, was born in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, on 1 September 1934. After graduating from the University of Amsterdam with a double M.A. (*summa cum laude*) in Sumerian and the History of Art of South Asia, she obtained a British Council grant which enabled her to study for the Ph.D. at the Institute of Archaeology, University of London. In 1964, as part of her dissertation research, she visited Moesgård Museum, home of the Danish Gulf expedition under P.V. Glob and T.G. Bibby, where she studied the material recovered on the island of Umm an-Nar in the Trucial States (now the United Arab Emirates). (During Caspers 1970: 216, n. 15) and, along with Danish archaeologist Karen Frifelt, she was probably the first to correctly date the so-called 'Jamdat Nasr' (now known as Haft-type) tombs on the slopes of Jabal Hafit in the interior of Abu Dhabi to c. 3000 B.C. Supervised by a master of Mesopotamian and Anatolian archaeology, Seton Lloyd, During Caspers' Ph.D. thesis on maritime trade between Mesopotamia, the Persian Gulf and the Indus Valley (During Caspers 1969) set the tone for much of her subsequent work.

After obtaining her degree, During Caspers returned to the Netherlands where she initially worked in the Manuscripts Room of the University of Amsterdam library. At about this time she obtained funding from the Netherlands Organization for the Advancement of Pure Research, for a trip to the British Museum in order to study material excavated on Bahrain by one Capt. Higham, as well as trips to study Parthian pottery at the Institute of Archaeology, Univ. of Torino, and Louvre (During Caspers 1972-1974: 135). In 1974 she obtained a research position at the Kern Institute in Leiden, where she also edited the *Annual Bibliography of Indian Archaeology*. Her efforts in this direction included trips to India and Pakistan to photograph museum collections, the results of which form an important documentary archive at the Kern Institute.

In 1986 a new Department of Archaeology was created at Leiden University and During Caspers was appointed Lecturer in the Archaeology of South and Southwest Asia. There her teaching concentrated on the Persian Gulf, Indus Valley and Central Asia. She retired from teaching in 1995 and intended to devote herself to the decipherment of the frustratingly enigmatic Harappan script, but her death on 31 January 1996 of a sudden heart attack cut short the pursuit of this dream.

Although During Caspers participated in a number of excavations (e.g. with Beatrice de Cardi at Bampur in Iranian Baluchistan in 1966; with the Harvard expedition at Tepe Yahya, Iran, in 1970; and with the Univ. of Birmingham in Oman, in 1994), she was not primarily a field archaeologist. Rather, her forte lay in the interpretation of already excavated material, and in particular in the identification of similarities bespeaking wide-ranging cultural contact which others, working from a narrower base of knowledge, simply could not recognize. Her first major article (During Caspers 1970a), in effect a *précis* of her PhD thesis, took up a theme which she continued to examine over and over again throughout her career as more data came to light in the Gulf region, the Indus Valley, Bactria and the Indo-Iranian borderlands (e.g. During Caspers 1970b, 1970-71, 1971a-b, 1972b, 1973a, 1973c, 1976, 1978, 1979a, 1982, 1983a, 1984c, 1985a, 1986, 1992a-b, 1993-95, 1994a-b). The second most important focus of her work was the Harappan or Indus Valley civilization (1963, 1979b, 1985b, 1985d-f, 1987a-b, 1989, 1990a-b, 1991a-b, 1992c-e, 1993). Finally, During Caspers contributed a good deal

to our understanding of Bahrain, known in cuneiform sources as Dilmun, in the Bronze Age and Parthian period (e.g. 1971b, 1972a, 1972-74, 1973a-b, 1979a, 1980, 1984b, 1989b). Sundry articles on Mesopotamia (1971-72) and Oman (1989a) complete a body of work which was to have included a monograph on the Harappan civilization entitled *The Unfinished Portrait*. This work, however, was never completed.

In the 1970's and 1980's, During Caspers was a regular attendee at the annual Seminar for Arabian Studies (at that time rotating between London, Cambridge and Oxford) and it was there that she met most of the archaeologists active in Kuwait, eastern Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the U.A.E. and Oman. At the same time, she was a consistent participant in the bi-annual meetings of the European Association for South Asian Archaeology, the main venue for reports on the latest developments in Harappan archaeology. Her sporadic involvement in fieldwork belied the fact that she followed developments in the Gulf and the Indus Valley closely, and her contributions to numerous Indian Festschriften bear witness to her close relationship with dozens of leading Indian and Pakistani archaeologists.

At Amsterdam During Caspers was a popular teacher, but as she operated on the fringe of mainstream Near Eastern archaeology, it cannot be said that she produced a large number of prominent students. Rather, her work has the hallmarks of a voice 'crying in the wilderness', as if she was intent on convincing the Dutch and wider international establishment of the importance of working at the interface between Iranian, Central Asian, Mesopotamian and Harappan archaeology, that interface being in the Persian Gulf. In this she was far from alone, as other scholars, such as C.C. Lamberg-Karlovsky, M. Tosi, G. Weisgerber, S. Cleuziou, B. de Cardi and D.T. Potts, made similar arguments. During Caspers, however, operated at something of a disadvantage in that she lacked her own excavation and was forced to rely on the published results of others. For this reason, her articles often quote at length from the publications of others, and yet in reality, she frequently pointed to correspondences and inter-relations which others failed to see.

During Caspers could be pugnacious. She certainly did not suffer fools gladly. She spoke her mind without hesitation and would never be characterized as a cautious scholar. By the time she rose to mount the podium and present a paper she had clearly convinced herself of her own argument, and no amount of dissent was likely to dissuade her. Her written work is uneven, and some of it is unnecessarily repetitive - quoting other scholars' opinions *verbatim* and at length was a favorite technique of hers. But her output was prodigious and although a decipherment of the Harappan script was unlikely to ever emanate from her pen, one can be certain that she would have continued to write on many oddities and unnoticed features of Gulf and Harappan glyptic, statuary, metals and ceramics had she not passed away at the age of 62.

Abbreviations

JNES

Journal of Near Eastern Studies

PSAS

Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies

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